

Fisher Studio Houses

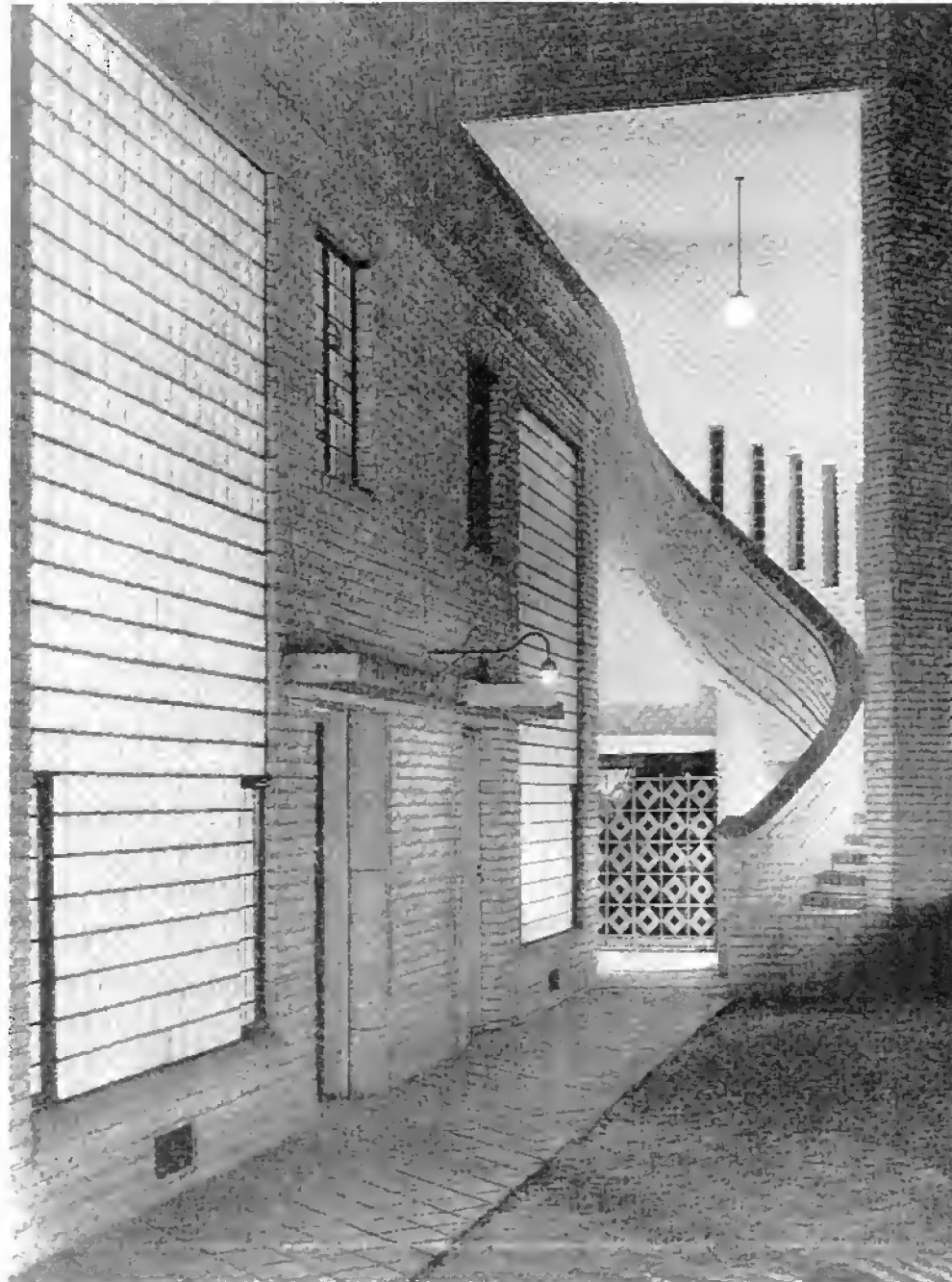
1209 N. State Parkway

**Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in August 1991
Recommended to the City Council on March 10, 1992**



**CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor**

**Department of Planning and Development
J.F. Boyle, Jr., Commissioner**



COVER and ABOVE: Two photographs of the Fisher Studio Houses, taken shortly after their completion in 1936. The building's only "public face" (cover) is this narrow section facing State Parkway. The entrances to the individual apartment units face an interior courtyard (above) that runs perpendicular to the street.

FISHER STUDIO HOUSES

(also known as the Frank F. Fisher, Jr., Apartments)

1209 N. State Parkway

(1936; Andrew Rebori and Edgar Miller, architects)

The FISHER STUDIO HOUSES is one of the city's finest pre-World War II modern designs. It is an exceptional--and rare--example of Art Moderne, a style of architecture influenced by European modernism. It was commissioned by Frank Fisher, an executive of Marshall Field & Co.

The unique layout of the 12 units on the extremely narrow site -- which runs perpendicular to the street -- has contributed to their desirability as residential apartments. Further distinguishing the building is its handcrafted ornamentation by prominent artist Edgar Miller.

side of the building. This landscaped courtyard serves as an entrance court, channels needed light to apartments, and adds a decorative touch to the property.

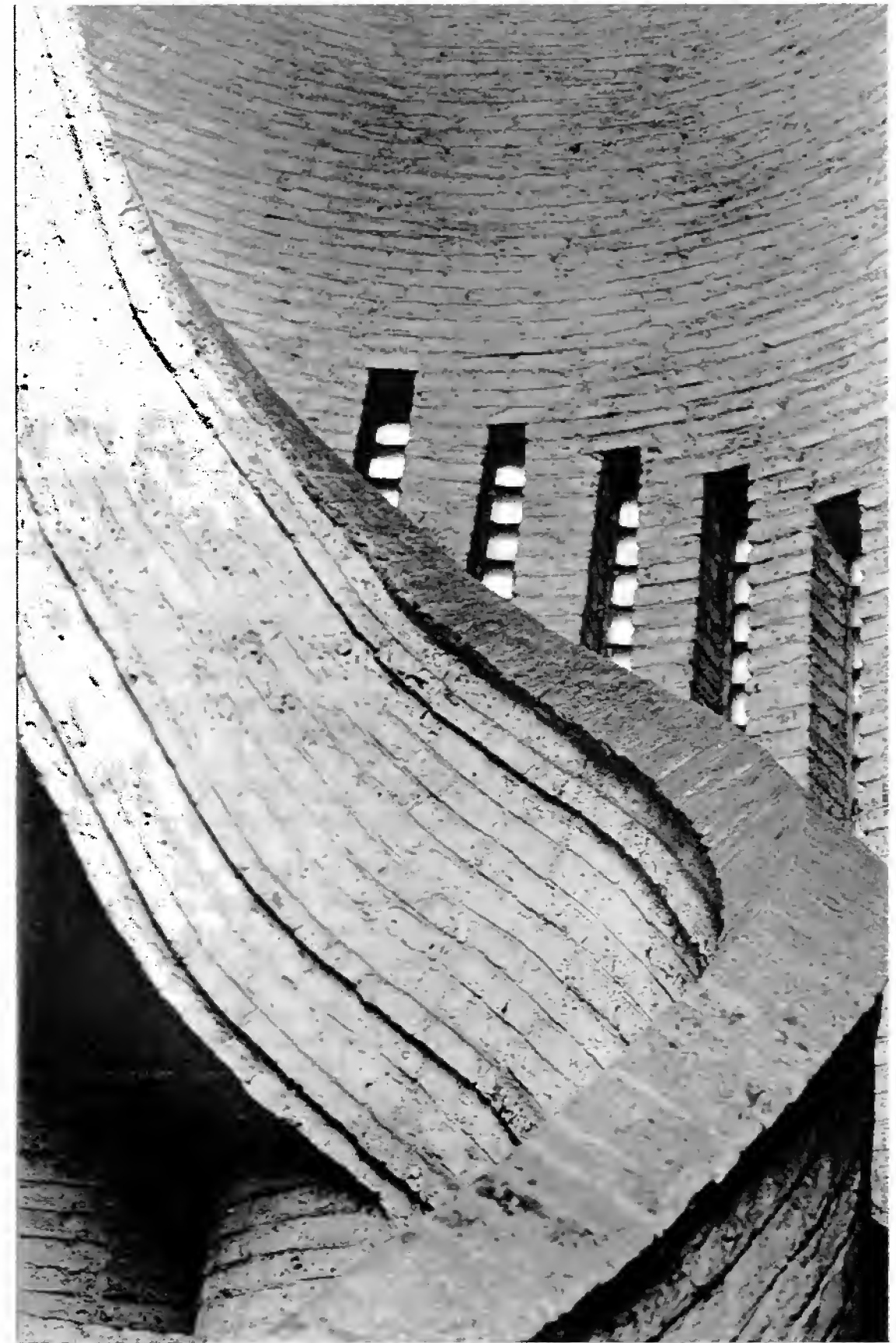
The Frank F. Fisher, Jr., Apartments is a four-story building containing thirteen duplex apartments arrayed in two tiers, stretching end-to-end from the street to the alley. The bottom tier of apartments is reached directly from the courtyard while the upper tier is approached via an exterior staircase and walkway. Exterior walls are white-painted common brick built around floor slabs of reinforced concrete. Glass block fills ninety percent of the building's windows with the rest enclosed by metal casements.

The facade on North State Parkway is a handsome example of Art Moderne design. Flat with rounded corners, it is accented with large glass-block windows curved and angled to catch southern light. A series of vertical glass-block strips light the exterior stairwell and three casement windows on the fourth floor are accented with chevron-patterned stained glass. Curved brick detailing accents the building's entrance, originally protected by a decorative metal gate. In addition, courses of projecting brickwork outline the curved glass block windows and casement windows.

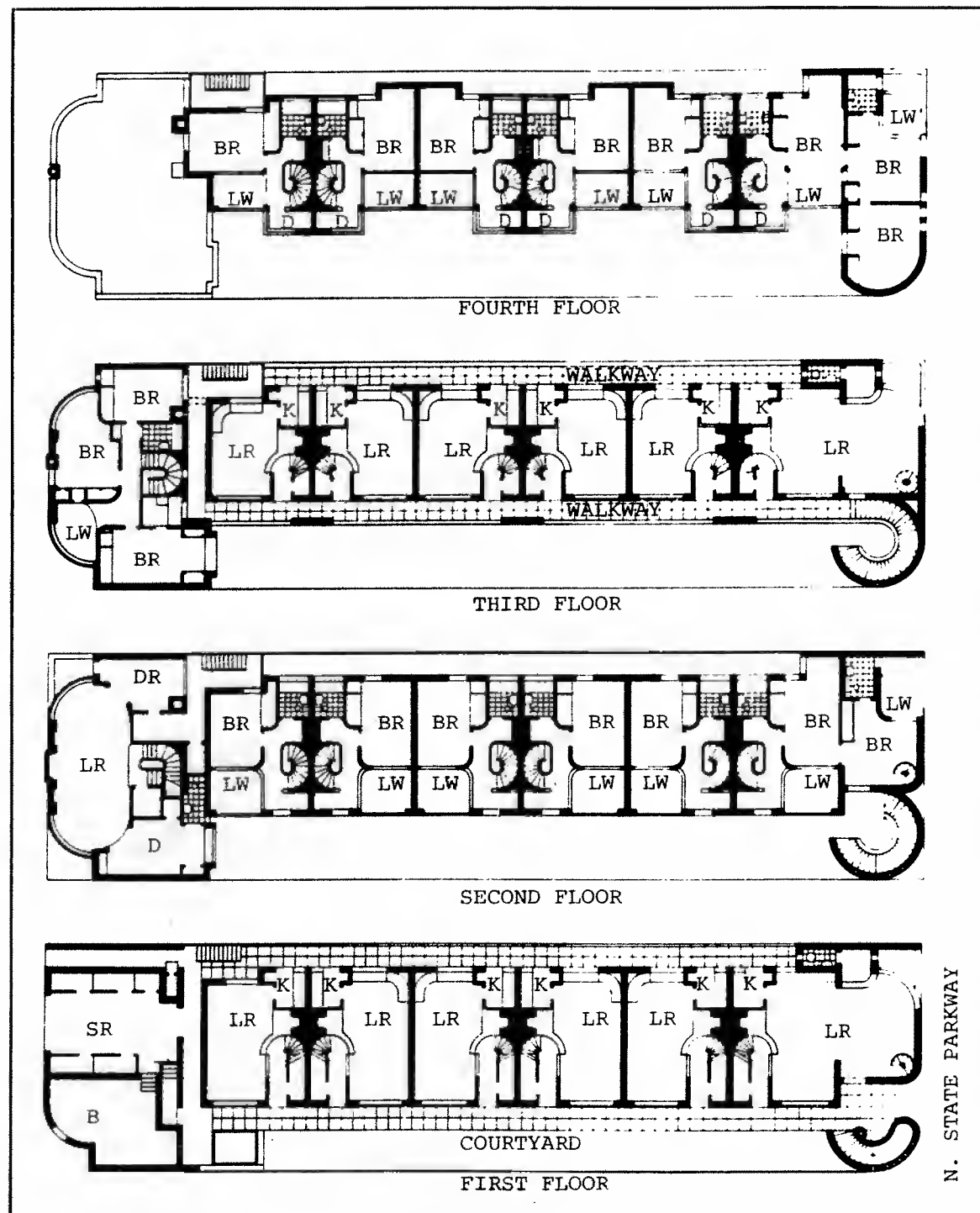
Upon passing through the entrance gate, visitors enter the courtyard, landscaped with grass, shrubbery, and a small decorative pool. Immediately to the left of the entrance is an exterior spiral staircase built of steel-reinforced brick which leads to the upper tier of apartments. The courtyard facade contrasts rough-textured common brick and shiny, translucent glass block in a strongly patterned yet disciplined design that reflects the internal arrangement of spaces through its window patterns. Visually, the lower two floors and upper two floors represent discrete elements. The lower tier has doorways to adjacent apartments set side-by-side, above which are small metal casement windows filled with decorative glass. Flanking the entrances are large, two-story-high, glass-block windows. The upper tier is similar but with certain differences. It is set back several feet to allow room for an open walkway leading from the entrance stairs, an unusual feature for Chicago apartment buildings. Rectangular brick bays containing glass-block windows project from the fourth floor, sheltering the upper tier apartment entrances while creating extra space within each apartment. These bays are supported by brick piers outlined with raised brickwork similar to that found on the street facade.

The Fisher Apartments is generously decorated with handcrafted artwork produced by the Chicago artist Edgar Miller. His many pieces, both figurative and abstract, give the building the touch of Arts and Crafts bohemianism that sets it apart visually from neighboring buildings. Casement windows are filled with a variety of stained-glass patterns, including Art Deco chevrons, and animal-decorated ceramic tiles ornament the brick parapet between the street facade's curved glass-block walls. In addition, patterned ceramic pavers survive in the courtyard, while a carved-wood gate ornaments the entrance to the building's largest apartment, set in a rear wing originally three stories high.

Ten of the units within the Fisher Apartments are considered one-bedroom apartments and are similar in their internal layout and decoration. A typical apartment is entered through a small entrance vestibule which steps down into a combined living-dining room averaging ten by twenty feet. The apartment's bedroom floor is reached via a curved staircase and contains a moderately-sized bedroom, a bath, and a tiny den-office. Light from the courtyard shines through a large two-story wall of glass block into a light well which extends upwards from the living room into the bedroom floor. Rooms are outfitted with a minimum of traditional detailing. Light coves placed in the stairwell and above glass-block windows provide built-in, indirect illumination. Each apartment was given its own wood-burning fireplace, set directly into



Rebore's longstanding appreciation of brick and its design possibilities is reflected in the exterior staircase of the Fisher Apartments. (Photograph courtesy of Robert W. Ahl)



The floor plans for the Fisher Apartments as illustrated in the 1976 publication *Chicago Architects*, written by Stuart E. Cohen. Key to symbols: B=Boiler Room; BR=Bedroom; D=Den; DR=Dining Room; K=Kitchen; LR=Living Room; LW=Light Well; SR=Storage Room.

the living room wall without a traditional mantel surround. A glass-block wall serves as a room divider between each kitchen and living room. An especially unusual feature was the replacement of sharp-edged cornices, moldings and corners with continuously-molded and rounded plaster walls and ceilings.

Three apartments, while similar in overall layout and detailing to the others, are more generously sized. Two face the street and have larger living-dining areas lighted by curved glass-block walls. They have an extra bedroom apiece but otherwise do not differ from the smaller apartments in any substantial way. The third apartment, possibly intended for Fisher's own use, occupies a portion of the first and all of the upper floors of the rear wing; it is the building's largest and most spatially elaborate apartment. A curved staircase leads from the first-floor entrance hall to a second-floor living room, twelve by twenty-nine feet, which is flanked by a small den and a dining room. Curved glass-block walls bracket the living-room fireplace, above which was installed a bas-relief sculpture by Edgar Miller. A semi-circular light well in one corner of the room extends the room spatially into the third floor which contains three bedrooms and a bathroom.

The Architect

Andrew Nicholas Rebori was born on the Lower East Side of Manhattan on February 21, 1886. His Italian-born father, Paul Rebori, had been an army engineer before emigrating to the United States with his wife, Louise. His father's accidental death when young Andrew was only three-and-a-half and the family's subsequent impoverishment had a major impact on the young boy's upbringing and education. Mrs. Rebori worked as a seamstress while Andrew and his two siblings, Louis and Mary, worked at a variety of odd jobs when not in school. At the age of fourteen, Rebori began work as a draftsman with the architect Charles Alling Gifford while attending Harlem Evening High School. Two years later in 1902, he became an employee of Herbert D. Hale, another New York architect. While working for Hale, Rebori received a first prize in architecture from the East Side Evening High School and took additional training in the atelier of Henry Hornbostel.

With the assistance of Hale, Rebori received a scholarship to the School of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology which he entered as a special student in 1905. A special student at MIT, considered the oldest architecture program in the United States, was defined as someone older than the average student and possessing at least two years of office experience. While at MIT, Rebori won the Boston Society of Architects senior prize in 1907 and qualified as a finalist for the Paris Prize Competition held at Columbia University. In 1908, Rebori received the Lowell Travelling Fellowship which enabled him to spend a year abroad, studying at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the American Academy in Rome.

Upon his return to the United States, Rebori worked for a brief period in the New York office of Cass Gilbert before making his way west to Chicago in 1911 to accept a teaching position in the Architecture Department of the Armour Institute of Technology, a predecessor of the Illinois Institute of Technology. Rebori taught classes in interior decoration and architectural history as well as the usual design studios.

In 1914, Rebori quit teaching to take a position as a junior partner to Jarvis Hunt, a prosperous and socially-adept Chicago architect. His exact role in Hunt's office is in question, but Rebori appears to have stayed with Hunt through the end of World War I. Projects completed during the fallow war years were designed under his own name and included small

recreational buildings for the Lincoln Park Commissioners and the remodeling of the Studebaker Theater in the Fine Arts Building.

The early years of the 1920s witnessed Rebori forming his own architectural firm, Rebori, Wentworth, Dewey & McCormick. His partners were members of socially prominent families. John Wentworth was descended from former mayor "Long John" Wentworth. The father of Albert B. Dewey, Jr., was a prominent Chicago real estate developer, and his brother was a United States congressman from Illinois. Leander J. McCormick was the grandnephew of Cyrus McCormick, owner of the McCormick Reaper Company and a founder of International Harvester. Rebori himself had made a socially advantageous marriage to Nannie Prendergast, a niece of Col. Robert McCormick, the publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*.

Extant evidence in the form of architectural drawings, specifications, and other office documents, combined with written reminiscences of friends and co-workers, indicate that Rebori was the sole design partner in the small but versatile firm, geared to the needs of Chicago's wealthy families. Important commissions during the halcyon years of the 1920s include the Chicago Riding Club, 639 North McClurg Court (1924); the Chicago Racquet Club at Schiller and Dearborn Streets (1923); an artists studio building at 737 North Michigan Avenue (1928, demolished); the Elizabeth Cudahy Memorial Library at Loyola University of Chicago (1929-30); and apartment buildings at 40 - 50 West Schiller Street (1923), 2430 North Lakeview Avenue (1926-27), and 1325 North Astor Street (1927-29).

Rebori's designs from these prosperous years were accomplished and refined, with those built in the early 1920s based on Italian Renaissance and Georgian precedents. Later buildings show his growing interest in Art Deco, a style based on work shown at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs and Industriels Modernes held in Paris in 1925. Throughout the twenties, Rebori's clients preferred their buildings to be comfortable and up-to-date in terms of conveniences but not shockingly modern.

This prosperous world ended with the stock market crash in 1929 and the ensuing depression. Rebori, Wentworth, Dewey & McCormick was forced to dissolve in 1930 due to lack of business. Rebori & Wentworth remained as a partnership for several years, but by 1933, the grimmest year of the Depression, the two partners had agreed to go their separate ways.

The 1930s were lean years financially for Rebori but also the period during which his best-known, most individualistic work was done. A professional turning-point was the Century of Progress Exposition held in Chicago in 1933 and 1934. Rebori designed two small interior exhibits plus a dramatic-looking, all-brick house for the Common Brick Manufacturers Association. One of several model homes sponsored by various building products trade associations and located in the Home and Industrial Arts Exhibit, the common brick house was strikingly different from anything built previously by Rebori. Hexagonal in plan and built throughout of reinforced brick, the house's sharp angles, textured brickwork and rooftop deck show Rebori's awareness of modern European Expressionism, an influence also visible in the courtyard facade of the Fisher Apartments.

He also collaborated with John Welborn Root, Jr., of Holabird & Root in the design of the Streets of Paris concession and was its director. A financial success, the Streets of Paris was a successor to the exotic "villages" located at previous world's fairs and a forerunner to present-day amusement park exhibits such as Disneyland's "Frontierland" and "Main Street". Completely enclosed by walls, the Streets of Paris created its own insular world of authentic-looking Parisian streets and sunlit plazas, dotted with convivial cafes and artists' kiosks.

After the close of the fair, Rebori continued a solo architectural practice from a small office in the Tribune Tower. Besides the Fisher Apartments, his best works from the years before World War II are the Madonna della Strada Chapel at Loyola University (1938) and the double house at 1328 North State Parkway, built in 1937 and resembling the Fisher Apartments stylistically.

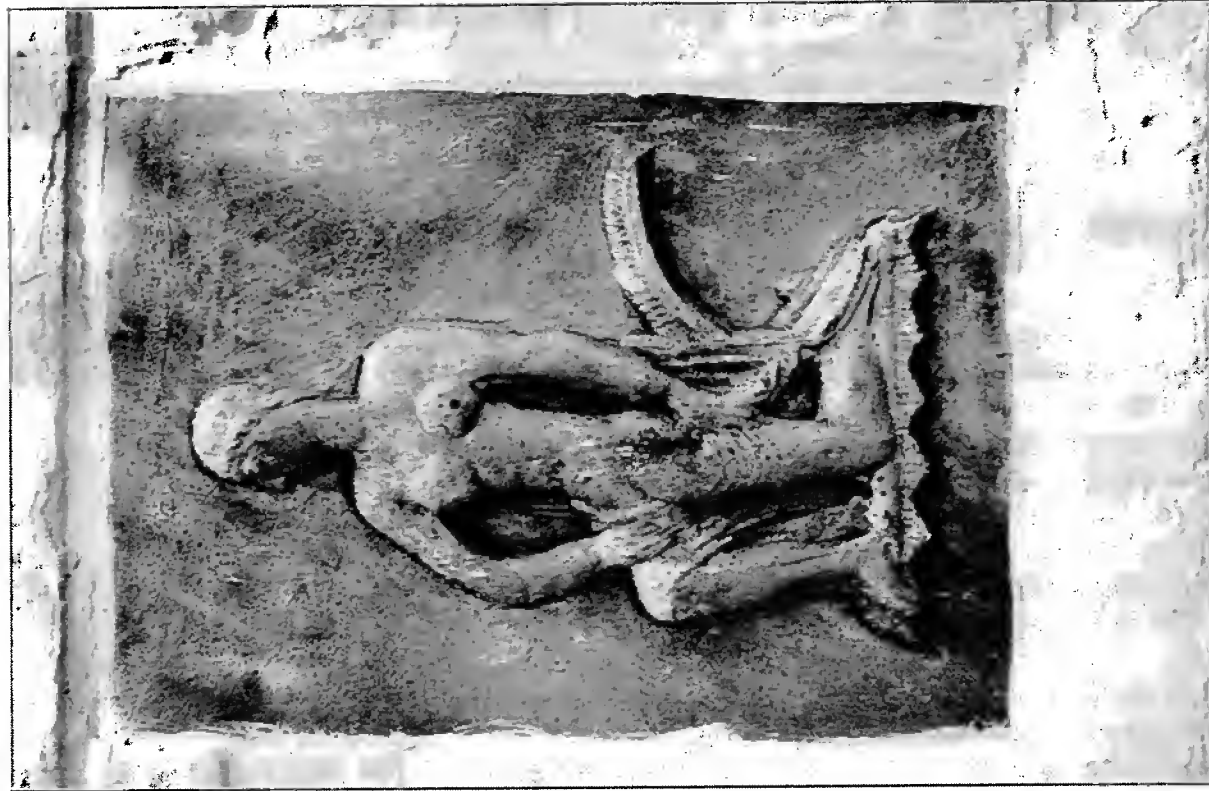
The boom in construction created by World War II brought Rebori several war-related projects, including the position as chief of site planning for the United States Naval Ammunition Depot in McAlester, Oklahoma. After the war, he became a consulting architect for DeLeuw Cather and Company, a large Chicago-based architecture and engineering company specializing in large-scale public works projects. Rebori's projects in the post-war years lack the personal interest and visual flair of his earlier work and include a diesel shop for the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad (1947-48), located on Chicago's West Side, and the remodeling of the Chicago Riding Club as studios for Chicago's CBS television affiliate (1955). Rebori retired in 1961 and died on May 31, 1966.

The Artist

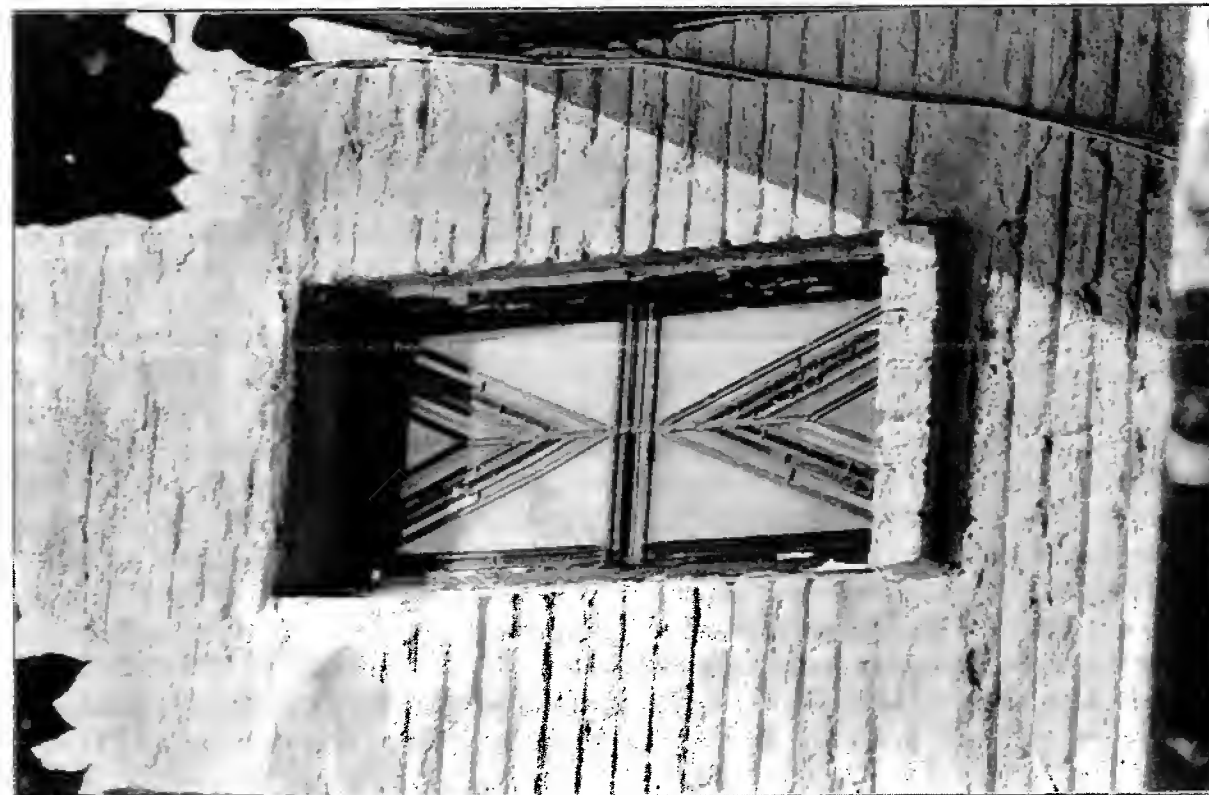
Edgar Miller was born in Idaho in 1901 and came to Chicago at the age of eighteen to study briefly at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Although Miller left before graduation, the Art Institute recognized the quality of his work in later years through their purchase and exhibition of several pieces. Miller worked as an apprentice in the studio of Alfonso Iannelli for four years before opening his own workshop. He regularly exhibited at the Art Institute, including the Exhibition of Modern Decorative Arts of 1925 and the Chicago Architectural League Exhibition of 1928, and won three Frank G. Logan medals over the years. Besides his own practice, he operated an art gallery, "The House at the End of the Street", in the early 1920s at which was displayed the work of John Storrs, Albert Bloch, and other Chicago artists. Miller was art director for the Streets of Paris at the Century of Progress Exposition and designed a number of murals for the concession. He practiced in the Chicago area until the 1960s when he retired, first to Florida and then California, only returning to Chicago in the last several years.

Miller worked in a variety of media, including carved wood and stone, ceramics, mural painting, and stained and etched glass. His work was favored by a number of Chicago architects, including Howard Van Doren Shaw, Thomas Tallmadge, Earl H. Reed, Barry Byrne, and Rebori. The collaboration between Miller and the large architectural firm of Holabird & Root was especially close. Miller's work for the firm included stained glass windows for the executive board room of the Palmolive Building, 919 North Michigan Avenue (1929); murals for the Tavern Club, located atop the 333 North Michigan Building (1928); a set of sand-blasted glass panels, depicting the goddess Diana, which graced the now-demolished Michigan Square Building at 540 North Michigan Avenue (1928); bronze sculpture for the North Dakota State Capitol in Bismark, completed in 1934; and the Technological Institute at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, completed in 1942, for which he designed a variety of sculptures. His most prominent local work, and a direct precedent for his Fisher Apartments work, was the redesign and embellishment of several brick rowhouses in the Old Town neighborhood for Sol Kogen in the 1920s and 30s.

Miller's work can best be defined as eclectic in the sense that he absorbed influences from a variety of sources. Earl H. Reed, Jr., wrote about Miller's art in the August 1932 issue of



Although added to the Fisher Apartments after its completion, this ceramic tile ornamenting the street facade has a folk-art quality similar to other decorative tiles designed for the building by Miller. (Terry



The fourth-floor apartment windows facing the street are filled with chevron-ornamented stained glass designed by Edgar Miller. (Terry

Architecture, "Through the modern pattern of Miller's art expression run threads of things seen in the South Seas, Central America, and our own West and Southwest. Often a fugitive medievalism or a primitive classic spirit predominates." The influence of Iannelli can be seen in his Prairie-influenced stained glass and his love of bas-relief sculpture. However, carved wood panels, woodcuts, and other stained-glass windows reveal an interest in folk art, mythology, and the Gothic traditions. Animals, especially birds, horses, and antelopes, were used as subjects frequently by Miller who felt that figurative art was more meaningful to the average person than abstract art.

Progressive Architectural Trends

The Frank F. Fisher, Jr., Apartments is an unusual building in the context of Chicago architectural history. Conceived outside the stream of thought that animated the early Chicago School and Prairie School architects, it is the synthesis of conflicting impulses, both progressive and conservative, in architectural theory and practice in the 1930s. The design of the Fisher Apartments marries aspects of the International Style, Expressionism, and Art Moderne, all of which rejected traditional architectural precepts. At the same time, however, the building's plan reflects a longstanding interest, dating in the United States to the 1850s, in artists' studios and the dramatic interior spaces inherent in this apartment type.

Modern architecture, with its bold new forms, materials and building technologies, was taking hold in 1930s America through a variety of means. Architectural periodicals such as *Pencil Points* and *Architectural Record* were exposing American architects, most of whom had been trained in the prevailing Beaux-Arts tradition which favored classical architecture, to the radical work being produced by students of the German Bauhaus, advocates of Expressionism, and other European modernists. Exhibitions such as the 1932 "Modern Architecture" show at the fledgling Museum of Modern Art in New York City also played a major role in the dissemination of the work of modern architects, both European and American. Lastly, the social disintegration of an increasingly fascist Germany encouraged the emigration to America of many architects dedicated to modernism, such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius.

The International Style acquired its name from *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*, the catalogue issued by the Museum of Modern Art as part of its "Modern Architecture" exhibit. So called because architects from several countries were involved in its development, the International Style originated chiefly in Europe. The new style had a strong intellectual underpinning based on modern structural principles and materials, and recognized no ties to previous architectural styles. International Style architects were utopian in thought, rejecting what they perceived as outmoded ways of building and embracing new, technologically oriented methods. Buildings were commonly built of concrete, glass, and steel and were starkly cubic in overall form with flat walls and roofs, a lack of overhanging eaves, and large expanses of glass. A complete absence of ornament was also typical. Functionalism and rationality of design, unfettered by the superfluous, were International Style ideals. An intellectual center for the new aesthetic was the Bauhaus, a design school in Germany headed for three years by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who came to Chicago in 1938 to head the School of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

The International Style was not the only progressive design theory being developed in Europe during the early years of the twentieth century. A parallel school of architectural

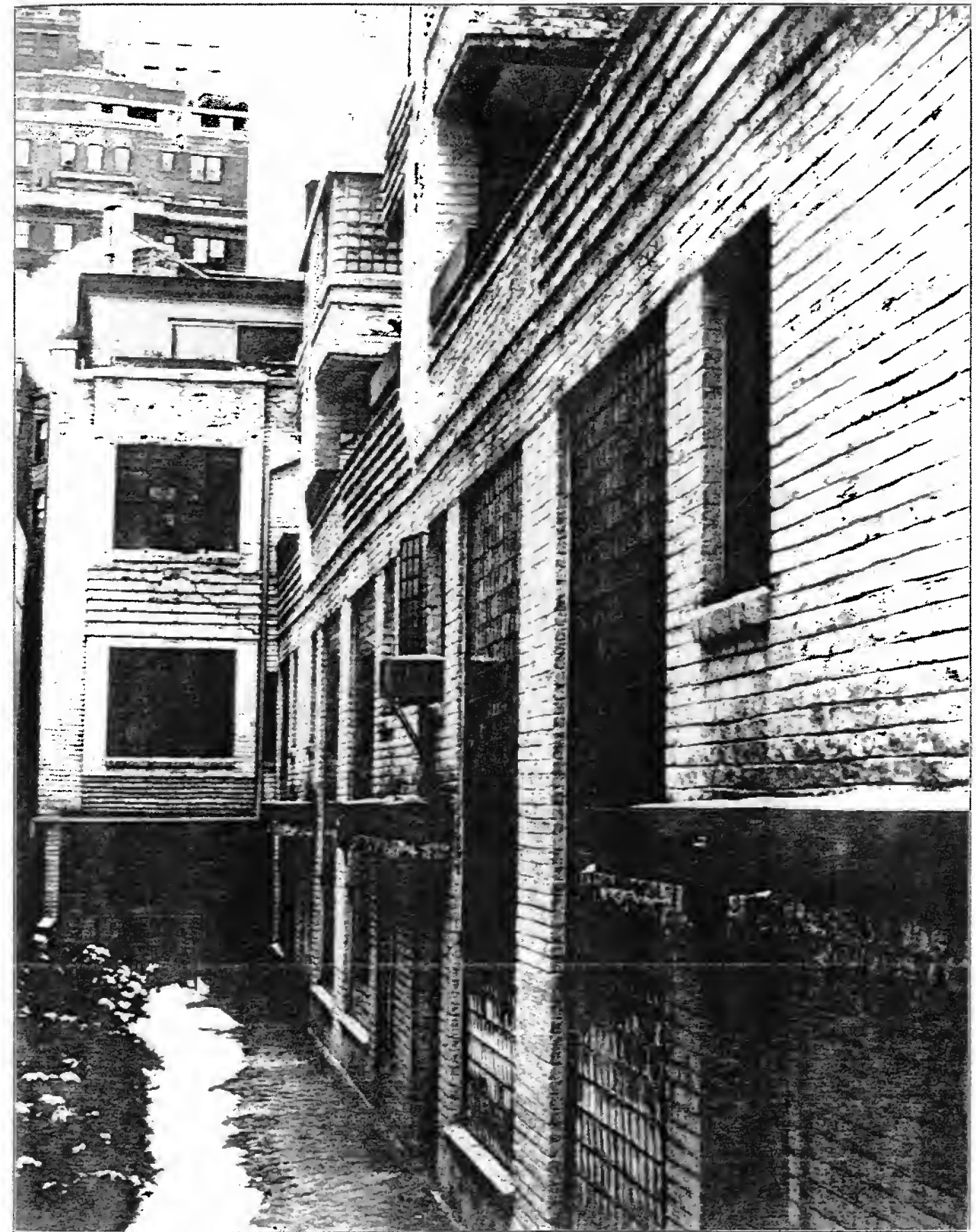
thought, called Expressionism, was advocated by a number of architects in Germany and the Netherlands. Never as influential as the International Style, Expressionism shared with it the belief that the world could be transformed for the better through architecture and that old design ways were no longer valid. However, Expressionist architects rejected functionalism and emphasized human intuition and emotion as appropriate tools in the design of architecture. Developing out of the earlier Art Nouveau and Jugendstil movements, Expressionism was characterized by plasticity of form and an appreciation of materials, especially brick. Window patterns and rooflines were extremely varied and reflected an awareness of local vernacular traditions. Patterned brickwork gave human scale and provided visual interest without the use of historic ornament. The German architect Erich Mendelsohn and Michel de Klerk of the Netherlands were two leading exponents of Expressionism.

Expressionism never made much of an impact in America, and the International Style was most influential in this country after World War II. Instead, the depression years saw the development of a native American progressive style known as Art Moderne. Superficially similar to the International Style in many of its visual characteristics, Art Moderne architecture lacked the theoretical underpinning and utopianism of the European style. Rather than a harbinger of a "brave new world", Art Moderne buildings were seen only as smartly modern, sleek, and stylish. They were characterized by smooth wall finishes without traditional surface ornamentation, soft or rounded corners (often with curved window glass), flat roofs, and horizontal bands of windows. These typical features combined to create a distinctive "streamlined" look that related Art Moderne architecture to the work of contemporary industrial designers such as Donald Deskey, Norman Bel Geddes, and Raymond Loewy.

The Fisher Apartments combines visual characteristics of all three progressive architectural styles. Its flat white street facade and flat roof shows the influence of both the International Style and Art Moderne architecture as does the use of glass block. The building's sculptured brick staircase and third-floor walkway are Expressionistic in their plastic use of brick, as are the fourth-floor bays and supporting piers. The courtyard elevation especially exhibits a strong Expressionistic feeling with its strong modeling and lack of traditional ornament.

A crucial aspect of both European modern and Art Moderne buildings was the importance of newly-available building materials and technology to their designs. The Fisher Apartments reflects this trend in its use of structural glass block and air conditioning. Structural glass block, as opposed to transom prisms such as Luxfer prisms, was developed in Europe during the 1920s but only became available in the United States in the early 1930s. Its translucency and insulating qualities were highly touted by glass manufacturers as suitable for buildings with undesirable views or noisy environments. Available in a variety of sizes and patterns, glass block became a fashionable building material during the 1930s and was widely used for Art Moderne and International Style architecture. An early example of the use of glass block, one which was widely published in the architectural and trade journals, was the William Lescaze Home and Studio at 211 East 48th Street in New York City, built in 1934. Dramatically different than its brownstone neighbors, the Lescaze Home and Studio reflects the influence of the International Style with its blazing white stucco facade framing large glass block windows, beautifully backlit at night.

An important example of the possibilities inherent in glass block construction was closer to home. The Owens-Illinois Building at the Century of Progress Exposition, built by a leading Midwestern glass manufacturer, was dramatically constructed with all exterior walls built of colored glass block. Designed by Elroy Ruiz, the pavilion was located near Rebori's common brick house and undoubtedly caught his eye.



The courtyard facade of the Fisher Apartments shows Rebori's debt to Expressionism in its emphatic brickwork. (Landmark Commission staff photograph)



The Fisher Apartments combines white-painted common brick and glass blocks in a design influenced by Art Moderne. (Terry Tatum, photographer)

The extent to which glass block was used in the Fisher Apartments, filling almost ninety percent of the fenestration, would not have been possible without the development of air conditioning units practical for small-scale residential use. Air conditioning became a common feature of many large buildings in the 1920s. Movie theaters and department stores especially touted their comfort during the hot summer months. It was not until the mid-1930s, however, that air conditioning became practical for houses and small apartment buildings. According to contemporary newspaper accounts, the Fisher Apartments was believed to be the first completely air-conditioned apartment building built in Chicago. Each apartment had its own air-conditioning unit, prefabricated by Fairbanks-Morse and Co., that provided fresh air through an outside wall intake register. The air was cooled, circulated through the apartment, and then expelled through roof ventilating fans.

The Artist Studio Tradition and Chicago

In many ways, the Fisher Apartments was a very up-to-date building in its visual image and conveniences. However, it did not reject all traditional considerations of space and ornament. The building's layout of duplex apartments with two-story spaces reflects a lifelong fascination by Rebori and other architects with artists studios. The large amount of ornament, hand-crafted in a variety of media (stained glass, ceramic tile, wood carving, and decorative plasterwork) reflects the ongoing influence of the Arts and Crafts movement, beginning in the United States in the 1870s. Although stylistically different from Queen Anne and Craftsman forms, Edgar Miller's artwork for the apartments reflects the same rejection of mass-produced, machine-made ornament that animated the earlier period.

The Fisher Apartments is a depression-era version of a duplex studio apartment building. Originally developed as a combined workplace and residence for artists, the studio apartment has an illustrious history. One of the earliest studio apartment buildings developed specifically for artists was the Studio Building at 51-55 West 10th Street in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. Designed in 1857 by Richard Morris Hunt, this simple red-brick building exhibited the common features of the studio apartment type. Each apartment was designed with a spacious, tall-ceilinged studio that served as workroom and parlor. This two-story space was illuminated with large, multi-paned windows that provided the requisite northern light preferred by artists. A kitchen and other auxiliary rooms were nestled under a mezzanine containing bedrooms which overlooked the workroom.

By the early 1900s, artists' studios had developed a following among the urban elite, many of whom appreciated the breadth of space found in such apartments. So popular were studio buildings that several never intended to house a single artist were built in New York and Chicago in the early years of the twentieth century. All possessed the requisite large, multi-paned windows, spacious studios, and bedroom mezzanines found in earlier buildings. There also was an added emphasis on attractive ornamentation and finishes, both exterior and interior, based on historic styles such as the Italian Renaissance and Gothic.

Chicago never had the sheer numbers of studio buildings that New York possessed, but the quality of those built was high. An early example of the true artists' studio building was the Tree Studios, built in three stages between 1894 and 1913 by Judge Lambert Tree, an early patron of the arts. Buildings containing studio apartments intended for non-artists included the Tudor-embellished apartment building at 20 East Cedar Street (1924-25, Fugard & Knapp); the Jackson Park Towers (1924-26, Walter Ahlschlager), located in the Hyde Park

neighborhood; and the 40-50 West Schiller Cooperative Apartments (1922, Rebori, Wentworth, Dewey & McCormick).

Rebori was fascinated with duplex apartments and studio spaces during his entire professional life. His design for the cooperative apartments at 40-50 West Schiller Street is an important early example of this interest and one which bears much similarity with the later Fisher Apartments. The earlier building is stylistically much different with its warm red brick walls, gray limestone trim, and restrained ornament based on Georgian precedents. It is, however, very similar to the Fisher Apartments in its layout and use of space. The building contains twenty duplex apartments, arranged in two tiers, which nearly enclose a landscaped courtyard. All but six apartments have two-story-high living rooms and bedroom mezzanines and resemble other studio apartments of the period. The street and courtyard facades possess an attractive combination of large and small multi-paned windows, arranged in a manner that reflects the interior arrangement of spaces.

Rebori's insertion of studio duplexes into relatively small, economically built structures such as 40-50 West Schiller and the Fisher Apartments provided apartments that "feel" like houses, with their spaciousness and their vertical separation of public rooms and private family space, despite their relatively small square footage. Rebori was an urbane man, both in his professional practice and his personal life. Throughout his career, he strove to design buildings that would serve as elegant backgrounds for stylish living. Handsome city apartments, congenial clubs, exclusive shops, theaters alive with entertainment, and towering office buildings flowed from his imagination onto paper and then into stone, masonry, and steel.

The key to this vision of city life was the apartment. Rebori's goal was the creation of the well-planned, elegant apartment that would be conducive to gracious living. He strove to design apartments that would combine functional efficiency with aesthetic grace. The period of the 1920s and 1930s was a changing time for Americans and the ways in which they lived. The increasing costs of single-family houses and large apartments which required staffs of servants made smaller apartments very desirable for the many middle- and upper-class households interested in city life. Rebori wanted to accommodate these functional needs, yet he did not want to give up the expansiveness and aesthetic attractiveness of older, larger apartments. In his search for a useful prototype that would fill these diverging requirements, Rebori found and adapted the artist studio.

Another precedent for the Fisher Apartments is the group of apartment buildings picturesquely rehabilitated by Sol Kogen and Edgar Miller in Chicago's Old Town neighborhood, beginning in 1927. Kogen, a local businessman and the son of a Russian-born yard goods merchant, had lived on Paris's Left Bank while studying art during the early 1920s. Upon returning to Chicago, Kogen concluded that Chicago housing was dull by comparison and that there was a need for picturesque, art-embellished apartments. Acting as his own contractor, Kogen began the rehabilitation of several brick rowhouses located on West Carl Street, now known as West Burton Place. He hired Edgar Miller, at the time in his middle twenties, as his assistant in the redesign and embellishment of these houses into studio spaces suitable for artists and other adventurous types. Rebori was asked to be consulting architect to the project, providing answers to structural questions beyond the expertise of Kogen and Miller. In a magazine interview published shortly before his death in 1966, Rebori stated that his involvement in the project was infrequent due to Kogen's own self-confidence and faith in Miller's design abilities. The result of this collaboration is unlike any other block in Chicago. The existing Italianate buildings, built in the 1870s and 1880s, were completely transformed into a Chicago version of Montmartre. Rough textured common brick contrasted with

curved glass walls, while Miller's decorative ceramic tiles, wood carvings, and stained glass windows added a hand-crafted touch. In their overall exterior profiles, the picturesque use of materials, and the quality of the artistic embellishment, the Kogen rehabilitations are direct forerunners of the Fisher Apartments, although not as coherent in their elevations and internal plans. Rebori must have been impressed with Miller's abilities since he continued their professional collaboration through a variety of projects, including the Streets of Paris and the Fisher Apartments.

The Fisher Apartments Today

The Frank F. Fisher, Jr., Apartments has retained much of its original appearance since its completion in 1937, but a few alterations have affected its exterior. A secondary entrance to the building, placed to the right of the facade's curved glass-block wall, has been added without harming the building's visual character. In fact, the new entrance door, detailed with carved chevrons, resembles Miller's artwork created for the Sol Kogen rehabilitations. In addition, a small fourth-floor penthouse has been added to the three-story rear wing, but with little visual impact except from the alley. The original diamond-patterned metal gate guarding the courtyard entrance has been replaced with modern grillwork. Wooden animal figures atop beams projecting above the courtyard entrance have been removed, as have two of the original five ceramic tiles ornamenting the street facade.

The Frank F. Fisher, Jr., Apartments reflects a time in the 1930s, not unlike the present, of intellectual ferment in the fields of architecture and design. Architecture based on traditional styles was becoming old-fashioned while architects searched for new modes of visual expression. The Fisher Apartments is a reflection of this new spirit, a genuine effort towards a synthesis of two conflicting forces: the advancing rush of building technology and modernism, contrasting with a lingering appreciation of handcraftsmanship and gracious living. Rebori commented on this effort to meld the old and new in an article on the Fisher Apartments, published in the October 1937 issue of *Architectural Record*:

Home life, whether in an apartment house or residence, is not a mass-production process but a social adventure which demands the leavening influence of grace and beauty. Modern architecture seeks a functional synthesis that will integrate the new mechanisms of living into an efficient whole; but when it perverts life to mechanism, it fails fundamentally of its purpose. Interior and decorative design should combine simplicity of conception and organization with functional efficiency, but the ideal to be striven for is to make each unit that is designed to house human beings an organism that will encourage and sustain pleasurable living.

Rebori kept that vision of "pleasurable living" in his mind's eye throughout his career. The Fisher Apartments are his finest, most original effort towards making that vision a reality.

APPENDIX

Criteria for Designation

Applicable Criteria: The staff recommends that the Commission initiate the designation for the Frank F. Fisher, Jr., Apartments. In our opinion, the structure meets four of the criteria for landmark designation set forth in Chapter 21-66 of the Municipal Code.

CRITERION 1: *Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

The Frank F. Fisher, Jr., Apartments is an outstanding example of the unsung diversity of Chicago architecture during the early years of the twentieth century. For many years, architectural historians studying Chicago's historic buildings concentrated their efforts on the innovations of the early Chicago School skyscrapers in the Loop and the smaller-scale Prairie School houses in outlying neighborhoods and suburbs, and ignored those buildings that did not fit either mold. This narrowness of vision is currently undergoing revision, and the importance of many distinctively-designed buildings such as the Fisher Apartments is finally being documented by scholars.

The quality of Rebori's design for the Fisher Apartments has been widely recognized during the past several years. It was featured in a 1976 exhibit titled "Chicago Architects," curated by architects Stanley Tigerman and Stuart Cohen, which examined several architects whose work fell outside the Chicago and Prairie schools. Paul Gapp, architecture critic for the *Chicago Tribune*, listed it as one of his favorite Chicago buildings in his 1980 book, *Paul Gapp's Chicago*. In addition, both Gapp and Tigerman chose the Fisher Apartments as an outstanding building deserving more recognition in a *Chicago Tribune* article, dated April 19, 1991, titled "5 Buildings You Shouldn't Overlook."

CRITERION 4: *Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.*

The design of the Frank F. Fisher, Jr., Apartments reflects the turning away from traditional historical styles and the growing interest in modernism characteristic of 1930s Chicago architecture. The Fisher Apartments is an excellent example of Art Moderne architecture while also incorporating aspects of progressive European styles such as the International Style and Expressionism. Yet Edgar Miller's embellishment of the building with a wide variety of handcrafted ornament gives it a visual quality extremely unusual for modern buildings of the period. The Fisher Apartments is a genuine effort towards the synthesis of modern design with nontraditional ornamentation and is a unique and important example of the alternative design theories influencing Chicago architects during the depression years.

CRITERION 5: *Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

The Frank F. Fisher, Jr., Apartments is identified as the work of the architect Andrew N. Rebori (1886-1966), whose work is significant in the City of Chicago. Trained as an architect in the prevailing

Beaux-Arts tradition of the early twentieth century, Rebori developed a Chicago architectural practice in the 1920s that catered to the needs of several of Chicago's wealthy families, including the McCormicks, Cudahys, Thornes, and Fields. His buildings from these prosperous years are accomplished and refined, based on Italian Renaissance and Georgian precedents as well as the newly fashionable Art Deco. Rebori's later work during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s shows his growing interest in progressive architectural styles, such as Art Moderne, the International Style, and Expressionism.

Although not as well-known as other Chicago architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright or Louis Sullivan, Andrew Rebori has received increasing recognition in recent years for his highly individual designs. One example of such recognition is the 1984 edition of *The Chicago Architectural Journal* which was dedicated to Rebori and contained two articles on his work.

Several buildings designed by Rebori have received landmark status, either through listing on the National Register of Historic Places or as Chicago Landmarks. The Fisher Apartments itself is cited in the Gold Coast National Register District nomination form, along with the similarly-designed double house at 1328 North State Parkway. The Gold Coast District also contains Rebori's Racquet Club and the 40-50 West Schiller apartments, both located at Schiller and Dearborn Streets, and the 1325 North Astor Street cooperative apartments. 1325 North Astor Street is located as well within the Astor Street District, designated a Chicago Landmark in 1975. In addition, Rebori's 1917 remodeling of the Studebaker Theater and the Fine Arts Building Annex, designed in 1924 and located at 421 S. Wabash Avenue, were included in the designation of the Fine Arts Building as a Chicago Landmark in 1978.

CRITERION 7: *Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.*

Kevin Lynch, the noted city planner and author of *The Image of the City*, defines the word "landmark" not in the legal sense, but in the way an individual perceives a building, structure or object in the context of the surrounding environment. He states that "the key physical characteristic of [a landmark] is singularity, some aspect that is unique or memorable. Landmarks become more easily identifiable . . . if they contrast with their background; and if there is some prominence of spatial location." The Frank F. Fisher, Jr., Apartments possesses a unique visual presence in the context of Chicago's Gold Coast, which developed as a neighborhood of single-family houses, both free-standing and attached, between 1875 and 1930. The Art Moderne Fisher Apartments, with its white-painted brick walls, glass-block windows, and exotic detailing, contrasts distinctively with the neighborhood's other historic buildings, designed in traditional historic styles such as Italianate, Queen Anne, Romanesque, and Georgian Revival and built of darker materials such as brownstone, graystone and red brick. This unusual appearance, coupled with the building's location on North State Parkway, just north of West Division Street at a prominent point of entry into the neighborhood, reinforces the average person's perception of the building as a neighborhood "landmark".

Significant Features

Whenever a building is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks identifies the "significant features" of the property, in order for owners and the public to understand which elements are most important to the significance of the landmark. It is recommended that the significant features for the preservation of the Fisher Studio Houses are:

- ▶ the State Parkway (west elevation) side of the building, including the roofline; and
- ▶ the interior courtyard, including the staircase at the northwest corner of the building.

Selected Bibliography

The Amsterdam School: Dutch Expressionist Architecture, 1915-1930. Wim de Wit, general editor. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983.

Andrew Rebori Collection. Chicago Historical Society Architectural Archives.

"Apartment House for Frank F. Fisher, Chicago, Ill.," *Architectural Forum*, 66 (May 1937), pp. 404-407.

Bowly, Devereux, Jr. "The Montmartre Look: Sol Kogen's Old Town Fling." *Inland Architect*, 22 (January 1978), pp. 18-21.

"City's First Air Conditioned Flats." *Chicago Tribune*. June 7, 1936.

Draper, Joan E., and Raymond T. Tatum. "The Buildings of Andrew Nicholas Rebori." *The Chicago Architectural Review*, 4 (1984), pp. 14-22.

Irving, Robert F. "Andrew Rebori, Dreamer and All-Around Doer." *Inland Architect*, 20 (May 1976), pp.12-16.

Rebori, A. N. "There are Decorative Objectives in Apartment Planning." *Architectural Record*, 82 (October 1937), pp.119-123.

Stern, Robert A. M., Gregory Gilmartin and John Montague Massengale. *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1890-1915*. New York: Rizzoli, 1983.

Additional research material used in the preparation of this report is on file at the office of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and is available to the public.

Staff for this publication

Terry Tatum, *research and writing*

This report was reprinted in July 1996



A 1972 photograph of the Fisher Studio Houses, showing how its Art Moderne-style design contrasts to neighboring Gold Coast buildings.

COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS

Peter C. B. Bynoe, Chairman
Joseph A. Gonzalez, Vice Chairman
Albert M. Friedman, Secretary
John W. Baird
J.F. Boyle, Jr.
Kein L. Burton
Marian Despres
Larry Parkman
Seymour Persky

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. It is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The Commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, whose offices are located at 320 N. Clark St., Room 516, Chicago, IL 60610; Ph: 312-744-3200; TDD Ph: 744-2958.